**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE - 3003**

**INSTRUMENT CARE AND HANDLING**

PURPOSE: To establish a standard operating procedure for proper instrument care and handling.

POLICY: All instruments will be handled with care to protect the instrument from damage, the staff from injury, and the patient from harm.

RESPONSIBILITY: All Preparation, Decontamination, and Case Cart personnel, who assemble/disassemble, clean, and/or pull instruments/sets, and equipment for use during surgical, ward, and emergency procedures.

INFORMATION: Care of any instrument begins with the user through the cycle of use, cleaning and sterilization and storage. All instruments, regardless of their destination should be handled properly and safely to extend the life of the instrument.

PROCEDURE:

1. Immediately after use, instruments should have gross contamination (gross contamination is defined as tissue or blood clot, not visible blood) removed at the point of use and placed in a covered container for transportation to the decontamination area of SPD. An enzymatic cleaning solution to assist in the breakdown of protein as well as disinfectant properties is recommended. Enzymes are effective in removing soil from instruments and lumens.

2. Solutions that are known to damage instruments:

a. Saline
b. Bleach
c. Iodine
d. Porcelain Cleaner
e. Peroxide
f. Dishwashing Soap
g. Hand Soap
h. Laundry Detergent

3. Instruments should be rinsed of all solution once they reach the decontamination area. Manual cleaning is not recommended, except for items that cannot be cleaned mechanically, i.e., ronguers, lumens, suction tips, cups, bone rasps and reusable burrs. A nylon brush should be used for cleaning the instruments. Instruments should only be cleaned beneath the surface of the water to prevent air borne contaminants.

4. Place the instruments in the ultrasonic cleaner, making sure they are placed in the trays to protect the tips of the instruments, i.e., traumatic towel clips. Heavy instruments should be placed in the bottom of the tray. Micro-instruments should be processed alone in their protective trays. Never place micro-instruments in the same container as general use instrumentation.

5. Ensure that the instruments are in their open position and heavy instruments are placed on the bottom of the basket when processed in washer-sterilizer, washer-sanitizer or disinfector.

6. Remove the instrument trays from the washer/sterilizer. Excessive moisture should be removed from the instruments by drying with lint free towels.

7. Assemble instrument trays by established instrument lists. Tray liners or lint free towels must be used to protect the instruments and wick moisture during steam sterilization.

8. During assembly, visually inspect instruments for damage and function by the following procedures:

a. All scissors should be tested for sharpness. Cut through a single layer of gauze all the way to the tips. Burrs may be identified in this manner even though the blades appear sharp.

b. Needle holders should be inspected for wear. Check jaws of needle holder for burs, worn edges or cracked or missing carbide inserts. Lock boxes should be checked for cracks and tightness. Needle holders should be checked by closing on a strand of suture (needle holder should be lifted by the suture and maintain the grip on the suture).

c. Tissue and dressing forceps have tips or teeth that meet precisely. All teeth should be accounted for. Inspect serrations and the proximal end on handles for cleanliness or cracks. If forceps appear flat, the tension is reduced and requires repair.

d. Retractors should have smooth, intact metal finish and free from burs or dents. Self-retaining retractors should have teeth or prongs in proper alignment. Inspect for screw tightness allowing for smooth function. Those with ratchet designs should have the disengagement lever checked for proper spring tension.

e. Suction devices must be inspected for dents or irregular bends. Run a stylet through to ensure free-flow. Those with removable tips must be complete and intact.

9. Instruments that need repair or sharpening should be removed and replaced with a functional instrument. Never allow damaged instruments to be placed back into use.

10. Tip protectors may be used on delicate tips to prevent damage to the instrument. Acceptable tip protectors allow the sterilant to reach the surface of the instrument. Tip protectors must be included on the instrument count sheets.

11. Large, heavy instruments should be placed in the bottom of the tray in an orderly manner.

12. Instruments should be placed on the stringer in the open position (except for traumatic towel clips) so the tips do not become damaged, to assure ease of removal by the user, and exposure of all surfaces to sterilant.

13. Separate packaged instruments should be placed in the appropriate sized peel pack to assure ease of removal, proper exposure to the sterilization process, and protection of the tips.

14. Once terminally sterilized, items need to be handled carefully when being placed into storage. Instrument trays should not be tipped during transportation. This will cause the instruments to shift and may cause damage to tips, etc.

NOTE: Chemical etching is the recommended method for marking instruments. Do not mechanically etch or use color-code tape. Mechanical etching destroys the finish of the instruments, and could harbor bacteria. Color-code tape is difficult to clean, harbors bacteria and dirt, and chips with age if not changed periodically.

Reference:

Central Service Technical Manual (Fifth Edition)
Storz Instruments. The Care and Handling of Surgical Instruments. St. Louis, MO
VA Handbook and Directive 7176
SPD Training Manual - Level 1